A

DISCOURSE ON DANCING,

DELIVERED IN THE

CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

CINCINNATI.

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Rom. xii. 2.—And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and perfect will of God."

In the preceding verse the Apostle beseeches Christians, by the mercies of God, to present their bodies, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which, he says, is their "reasonable service." He would have them regard themselves as consecrated to the service of God, as completely and exclusively, as was the sacrifice on the Jewish altar. That they might do this, he urges them not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed, their minds being renewed, that they might understand and obey the good, perfect and acceptable will of God. That we may properly understand and apply the passage before us, we may remark—

1—That in the Scriptures the Church of Christ and the world are constantly represented as standing in opposition to each other. "The world," said our Savior, "cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." "Love not the world," says John the apostle, "neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." I need not attempt to adduce further proof, that conformity to the world is inconsistent with piety, and will inevitably ruin the soul.

2—Scripture warnings, such as the text and those just quoted, as well as the history of the church, prove but too conclusively, that the tendency of christians, and, therefore, of the church, is

to worldly conformity. The causes of this tendency are obvious. Christians very naturally desire to please those unconverted persons with whom they are connected by ties of kindred or of friendship, and to secure the good opinion of those whom they respect. And they would fain escape the reproachful imputations of bigotry and illiberality, which will certainly be cast upon those who separate themselves from the world. Never is the danger of conformity so great, as when we are urged by those who profess great respect for religion, just to participate with them in those *innocent amusements*, as they are called, which, whilst they afford relaxation from the cares and business of life, surely injure no one. There is in the followers of Christ sufficient remaining depravity and liability to err, to give power to such solicitations, unless they are on their guard.

Those who hear me, will bear witness to the truth of the declaration I now make — that one of the chief reasons why the moral influence of individual christians, and of the church upon the unconverted is not greater, is to be found in their conformity to the world. They so far transact their business on worldly principles, and show such an inclination to conform to the fashions and seek the pleasures of the world, that non-professors doubt whether religion either controls the conduct of those who embrace it, or affords the happiness it claims to impart. It was evidently the purpose of our Savior, that the line which separates his church from the world, should be broad, and distinctly seen; that the members of his church should indeed "walk as children of the light;" and christians never more seriously err, than when they expect to secure the conversion of their friends by approximating them in their religious views and conduct. On the contrary, there is far better reason to hope for their conversion, when they are constrained constantly to see the evidence that the kingdom of Christ "is not of this world."

If these things be true, then it is evident, that, in enquiring concerning the lawfulness and expediency of conformity to the world in any particular case, we should not forget on which side the danger lies. Christians are warned solemnly and frequently against being conformed to the world; but they are never warned against too great separation from it. The conclusion is unavoidable, that the danger is all on one side. For if christians had been in danger of withdrawing themselves too far from the world, surely they would have been put on their guard. For illustration, in the Scriptures we read — "Let no man think of himself more highly than he ought

to think;" but we never read — "Let no man think *more meanly* of himself than he ought to think." Why do the Scriptures contain no such warning as this last? Because there is no danger that any will think too meanly of themselves. The danger is all on one side. Just so it is with regard to worldly conformity. Professors of religion and others ought, therefore, to be extremely cautious in condemning that strictness of discipline by which the church of God would guard her members against a worldly spirit and life. As the tendency of things is toward the world, there is far greater danger that the discipline of the church will be too lax, than that it will be too strict.

The sin against which, in the text, christians are guarded, is being conformed to the world. There are many particulars embraced in this divine precept. 1. They must not be conformed to the world in *faith* and in *moral principles*. These the christian derives from the word of God, the world does not. 2. They must not be conformed to the world in their *affections*, *tempers*, and *desires*. 3. Nor in their *deportment*. They must "walk as children of the light." 4. Nor in their *amusements* and *pleasures*. On this last subject I wish to speak on the present occasion.

The world have invented many amusements by which to beguile their tedious hours, and gratify their unholy dispositions; amongst which I may mention the Circus, the Race, the Theatre, Card-playing, and Dancing. The time would fail me to speak particularly of all these. I shall to-day confine myself chiefly to the last mentioned, DANCING; though many of my remarks will be equally applicable to the others. In discussing this subject I propose, first, to give some account of dancing, as it is spoken of in the Scriptures; and, secondly, to enquire whether participation in dancing, as now conducted as a fashionable amusement, is consistent with a christian profession.

First. — It is certain that dancing of some kind was practiced at a very early period, amongst the Jews, and amongst other nations. In regard to the design, the occasions and the manner of dancing, we remark —

1st. — It was considered a part of religious service. Thus we read, that "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her, with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." The Israelites had passed

through the Red sea, the waters forming a wall on either side of them; and Pharaoh and his army pursuing them were overwhelmed in the waters. Miriam, accompanied by the Jewish women, went forth in a procession, singing the praises of God, and dancing — thus not only by their songs but by bodily action expressing their joy and their gratitude to God. So David, when the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem, "danced before the Lord with all his might." He leaped for joy at an event so propitious as the return of the ark, which had long been absent. It is to such dancing the Psalmist refers, when he says of the children of Zion— "Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp." Dancing was also considered amongst some pagans a part of their religious service. This practice seems to have prevailed among the Egyptians; and therefore the Jews when worshipping the golden calf, feasted and danced. The same practice existed also amongst the Romans.

2d — Dancing was considered specially proper on joyful occasions, when some imminent danger had been escaped, or some great blessing enjoyed. The Jewish women danced when the Egyptians were overthrown, and the people of God delivered. David danced when the ark was restored. In the parable of the prodigal, the family are represented as feasting and dancing, when he returned. Solomon refers to such occasions, when he speaks of "a time to dance."

3d — Dancing among the Jews seems to have been confined chiefly to *females*. At least, there is no intimation that the sexes ever danced together. Possibly they may have done so, when they worshipped the golden calf. Miriam and the Jewish women sung and danced at the overthrow of the Egyptians. On an annual religious festival, we read, that the daughters of Shiloh came out "to dance in dances." And when David returned, after having slain Goliah, "the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music." The daughter of Herodias, we are told, on a public occasion, displayed herself as a dancer before Herod, his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Gallilee. In doing so, she proved herself as destitute of modesty, as of humanity, when afterwards she demanded as her reward the head of John the Baptist. It is indeed an instructive fact, that the dancing of an immodest and foolish girl was the immediate occasion of the death of the greatest and best man who then had lived on the earth! It was probably of

one of those public dancers, such as in our theatres, attract such crowds even of respectable persons, male and female, that Sallust spoke, of as "too fine a dancer for a virtuous woman."

It is evident, that in the Scriptures there is found absolutely nothing to countenance dancing, as conducted in our day. From dancing, as practiced amongst the Jews—the dancing of females alone—we would not apprehend any serious evils as likely to result. Indeed, it would perhaps be found no easy matter to awaken an interest in such dancing, amongst the youth of the present day.

Secondly— We proceed now to enquire, whether dancing, as now conducted as a fashionable amusement, can be participated in by christians, without sinful conformity to the world. Is it an amusement which the church can safely tolerate in her members? And is it one in which pious parents can, without violating their most solemn vows, and disregarding their most sacred duties, have their children instructed?

Perhaps it may be well, first, to enquire, whether dancing is of any very great advantage to those who participate in it? Is it a thing of such importance, that it cannot well be dispensed with; and so peculiar in its desirable features, that no substitute, less objectionable, can be found? For if it is of essential advantage; if our children must be seriously injured by dispensing with it; we might reasonably hesitate to condemn it. But if such is not the fact; if it is little more than a fascinating amusement—one which might be denied them without serious detriment; surely no christian of proper feelings would be disposed to disturb the peace of the church, or to wound the feelings of brethren, for the sake of participating in it himself, or of having his children do so. Were we to judge of its importance by the zeal with which even some professors of religion contend for it, and their exceeding reluctance to give it up; we should indeed regard it as almost essential to the enjoyment of life! What, then, are the great advantages to be derived from dancing?

It will not be pretended, that it is required as a healthy exercise to the young. For exercise, to be healthy, must be regular; it must be enjoyed *daily*. Dancing parties cannot be so constantly attended. Moreover, no one will pretend, that the excessive exercise so constantly taken at balls and dancing parties, in heated rooms, followed by exposure to a cold night air, contributes to health. No one acquainted with facts of frequent occurrence, will deny, that the health of many young females is destroyed by excessive exertion on such occasions, the consequent exhaustion of the system, and exposure to a cold

atmosphere, on leaving at a late hour, the place of amusement. The young, blooming in health and buoyant in spirits, are not aware of the danger to which they are exposed; nor can the repeated admonitions of parents make them realize it. The excitement produced by the company, the dance, the music, the prevailing levity, banishes from their minds all thought of danger to health; and fatal disease has often seized on the system, before the slightest apprehension is felt. Thousands of the gay and thoughtless are thus hurried into eternity, and thousands more drag through a life of disease and suffering. Of all the amusements yet invented, there is no one, so far as I know, in which the health, especially of females, is so much endangered. I cannot but wonder, that prudent parents do not see the risk they run in having their children taught to seek pleasure in the excitement of the ball room. Could they forgive themselves, if called to bury a beloved daughter, in consequence of exposure in attending a dancing party or a ball?

Dancing is not necessary as an *amusement*. I cheerfully admit, that the mind,—especially of the young—should not be kept constantly employed either in study or in business;—that relaxation is desirable and necessary. But in this matter, *children* (and if dancing is ever harmless, it is among children,) can take care of themselves. They require relaxation, as also do adults, much more frequently than dancing parties can be attended, and their minds are fruitful in inventing or learning amusements. You never saw half a dozen of them together, at a loss for something to amuse them. And surely no one will pretend, that adults, young gentlemen and ladies, can find no suitable relaxation, but in dancing. Reading, walking, riding, social intercourse, &c. are abundantly sufficient. And if, in spending a social evening, conversation becomes dull, and the time drags heavily; we cannot but think, it may be well to separate and add to the stock of ideas.

But it is said, dancing is quite important, inasmuch as it gives to the young a *graceful carriage*, not easily attained otherwise. Of this I would not pretend to be a very competent judge; nor would I at all undervalue such an accomplishment. I cannot but think, however, that it would require quite a critic in the graces, to determine which of several young persons, otherwise equally well educated, had learned to dance. Indeed, I doubt very much whether parents generally send their children to the dancing school, or whether their children dance chiefly for this particular reason. Whether they do or not, if there be

valid objections to dancing as now practiced,—if it be inconsistent with the profession and practice of true, elevated piety,—and if it be morally and religiously injurious to the young, all must acknowledge that a graceful carriage should be sought in some other way.

But the question is asked—why do you object to dancing? What sin is there in it? Why must you be so illiberal and bigotted as to oppose an amusement so graceful, and so agreeable to the young? Why so unreasonable, as to deprive them of pleasures they so much desire? To these questions I proceed to reply. And allow me to say —

1 — That I am far from being disposed to condemn that which is innocent, and equally far from desiring to deprive the young of one solid enjoyment. I would that their pleasures were an hundred times greater than they are; and for this reason I oppose the fashionable dancing of the day. I am sure, there are objections to it, which in maturer years, if not now, they will appreciate—especially should they ever become devoted christians.

2—I know, that in attempting to prove the impropriety of dancing, I labor under serious disadvantages in regard to a part of the community, perhaps a part of my audience. For many, especially amongst the young, have become so fascinated with it, that they cannot, with any degree of impartiality, hear and weigh the arguments advanced; and yet, like all others under the influence of prejudice, they are not at all aware of the extent to which their judgments are warped by their feelings. Again — many, having no experience of religion, can form no proper judgment concerning what might promote or injure personal piety. Nothing is more certain, than that the religious opinions and views of every individual converted to God, undergo a great and radical change. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Things before admired, are disapproved; and those formerly regarded as quite innocent, are often deemed deeply sinful. It would be strange if it were not so, since every real christian has been "called out of darkness into marvellous light;" and since "many things highly esteemed among men are abomination with God."

But notwithstanding the disadvantages under which I must present this subject to the minds of some, I think, I shall be able to satisfy the impartial, that to participate in the dancing of the present day, is to be conformed to the world, and that Christians who encourage their children to dance, do throw great obstacles in the way of their

conversion, and do violate their solemn covenant to "train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

We do not object to the mere *bodily exercise* of dancing, nor to dancing after music. In the mere exercise there is nothing good or evil. But we object to it as now conducted, with its attendant circumstances and influences. These, taken together, we are constrained to regard as most unfriendly to true religion; as wholly inconsistent with that devoted piety which the Scriptures require all to cultivate, and which is essential alike to their happiness and their usefulness.

I proceed to prove, that dancing, as now conducted, presents temptations, numerous and strong, to levity, vanity, imprudence, and irreligion. And if it does, it evidently cannot receive the countenance of consistent christians. They are in the habit of praying daily, "lead us not into temptation;" and, they know they cannot consistently offer this prayer, and then needlessly go where they are sure to be tempted. As well might they pray, — "give us this day our daily bread," and then neglect all the means by which food can be secured. It is our duty to watch, as well as to pray. Means must be employed to avoid the evil, as well as to secure the good. And certainly no pious parent would be willing to place his children under the influence of temptation to irreligion and sin; for to his grief he is constrained to see, that even under influences the most favorable, they are strongly inclined to wander from the path of virtue.

I am aware, that there is some difficulty in the discussion of this subject, arising from the various *phases* it assumes, from the family dance in the parlor of a professor of religion, under the eye of the head of the family, to the gayest and most brilliant ball, and even the *masquerade dance*. We labor under the same difficulty in showing the sinfulness of card-playing, horse-racing, and the theatre. It might be difficult to prove it a sin in itself for a few young persons to amuse themselves, an hour or two, by playing at cards. We know, however, that it is an attractive and exciting amusement; that when once our children have become pleased with it, they are likely to yield to the suggestion, that by risking a few cents, additional interest will be imparted to the game; and we know, that, having gone thus far, they are fairly introduced to the gaming table, and that they are likely enough to become regular gamblers. We proceed, therefore, upon the Latin adage "*obsta principiis*," — resist the beginnings of evil.

Or rather, we are guided by the word of inspiration — "Abstain from all appearance of evil."

It must be admitted, too, that all theatrical performances are not necessarily evil. Dramatic pieces might be written without an objectionable sentiment; and, for the amusement of the young, they might be performed in the private parlor or elsewhere. But we know, that theatrical performances are very attractive. We also know something of the history of theatres; and we know, that, so far from being, as their advocates pretend, schools of morals, they have been, in every age and country, the hot-beds of vice— the places where the principles of youth have been corrupted, their evil passions excited, and where multitudes of the most promising have taken the first step to infamy and ruin. And, theorise as you may, it is impossible to improve the character of the theatre. The great majority of the patrons of the theatre will ever be the gay, the dissipated, the irreligious and the unchaste; and the writers of plays and play-actors will ever cater to the corrupt taste of those from whom they expect their chief patronage. Knowing, therefore, what has been, and what must be the character of the theatre, the enlightened and consistent christian, far from attending, or having his children attend it, will stand in the attitude of firm, uncompromising opposition.

On the same general principle we oppose dancing, as now conducted. Suppose we admit, that there is nothing improper in the family dance in your parlor; we know perfectly well, that this is but the commencement of the difficulty. Your children learn to dance; they are delighted with dancing; you have admitted that there is nothing improper in it; and now that the principle is conceded, they will carry it out for you. And you will find it no easy matter to prove to them, that dancing in the parlor is proper enough, but dancing in a large and elegant ball-room, quite sinful. They will attend balls, the gayest and most brilliant of them; and you cannot prevent it. You have introduced them to an amusement of the most fascinating character; you have conceded and contended that dancing is not wrong; and now that they have reached the age when they claim to act for themselves, they will pay little regard to your prudent advice. It is like the temperate use of ardent spirits. When once the taste is formed, counsel is in vain. We, therefore, take dancing as it has been, as it is, and as it will be; and we oppose it. The *parlor dance* is the beginning of evil,—the beginning of an evil not to be controlled, if at all countenanced.

But I must now present those considerations which induce me to oppose dancing.

1.—Dancing, as now conducted, is an *extremely fascinating amusement*. For days before one of your balls, how completely it takes possession of the gay dancers. The selection and arrangement of articles of dress, the company they are to meet, the display they are to make, exclude almost every thing else from their minds; and then for days afterwards, the scenes and occurrences of the evening furnish themes of thought and conversation. When a student, and afterwards a teacher in College, I observed that few young men who danced gracefully, stood well in their classes, or graduated with honor. They were delighted with the excitement of the ball room; their graceful motion was complimented by the ladies; and by intense excitement and consequent prostration, they were wholly disqualified for study. Thus every ball that occurred, would cause them the loss from study of several days. I have observed the same thing in female schools; and I have known experienced teachers positively refuse to instruct young ladies who, at the same time, proposed to attend either dancing schools or dancing parties.

Now I submit it to the judgment of every reflecting mind, whether it is wise, whether it is proper to select for our children amusements which are so likely to disqualify them for useful employments. And I submit to every Christian, to every parent who desires the conversion of his children, whether an amusement, which so completely excludes from the mind, for the time being, sober thought and reflection, can be favorable to permanent religious impressions. Can we hope for their conversion, unless they can be induced "to consider their ways," to think seriously and seek earnestly the salvation of their souls.

2.—The different *steps* or *dances*, like the fashionable plays of the day, are arranged and directed by those who, for their prudence and modesty, have no claims whatever to our confidence. Their aim is to please those from whom they expect their chief patronage; and they are not generally remarkable for that prudence with which a christian would be satisfied. It cannot be denied, that in some of the fashionable dances, liberties are taken, and are expected to be taken, by gentlemen, which at other times would be offensive. Take in connection with this, another fact, viz:

3.—That dances and balls are generally, if not always, conducted by the young, the thoughtless, the gay, the irreligious. Sober persons

may occasionally or even frequently attend; but they are not present in such numbers or with such firmness as to give character to them. This is one of the amusements which properly belongs to the world; and rightly enough the world claims to manage its own pleasures. Christians and their children, therefore, if they participate in them at all, must be conformed to the world.

Now, these things being so, let me ask considerate christians, and especially christian parents, what assurance they can have, that things will be conducted in the dances, with becoming prudence and modesty? Will there be prudence as to the *time* spent? How often are they continued until after midnight? What would be said, if christians should venture, in the midst of the most powerful revival, to protract religious services to such an hour? Their fanaticism would be proclaimed throughout the city; and all prudent people, and especially the irreligious, would cry out against them. It is, by the way, a little remarkable, that not a few of those who can remain till so late an hour at the theatre and in the ball room, strongly disapprove of religious services in the evening, and are quite unwilling for their families to attend them! Yet the exposure of health in the ball room, and in leaving it, is tenfold greater — so great that, as already remarked, not a few females lose their health and their lives by it.

Is there any assurance, that the dance will be conducted in a prudent *manner*? Ladies who attend such places, must dress *fashionably*; and we certainly know that Madam Fashion is not one of the most prudent ladies, particularly when she displays her taste *on special occasions*. There are, too, as already remarked, certain dances in which liberties are taken which no prudent lady would allow at other times; and they are taken by those who have no just claims to intimacy. Your daughter may, if she have reflection enough, disapprove of these dances; but she has gone to one of the world's amusements; and she will probably not be willing, by objecting to them, to expose herself to the sneers of those who might intimate, that she is modest overmuch. But the young, excited as they are in the ball room, are not likely to indulge in much reflection. You cannot put old heads on young shoulders; and if you could, they would not dance at all. Those who will take the trouble to read Addison's views of dancing, will see that, without wholly condemning it, he strongly objected to the manner in which it was often conducted,

and presented some thoughts bearing on the general subject, which prudent persons and especially parents, would do well to consider.

I have said, that dancing is a worldly amusement, and is controlled by the worldly, the gay, the thoughtless, the irreligious. When professing christians allow themselves to participate in this amusement, they become identified in fact and in feeling with this class of the community. They throw themselves into an atmosphere which is most unfavorable to the cultivation of piety. They place themselves in a circle from which serious conversation on religious subjects is, by general consent, excluded; and where the excitement of the music, the dance, the company, the wine, all tend to produce the highest degree of levity. I defy the christian who has any degree of spirituality, to mingle in such a scene, without feeling himself seriously injured, almost wholly disqualified for religious devotion. Let him, after spending an evening in this way, retire to his closet for the purpose of reading the Word of God, and offering the evening sacrifice of prayer, thanksgiving and praise. His own experience, one would think, would be sufficient to determine him never to spend a second evening in the same way. The absence of devotional feeling, and the distraction caused by wandering thoughts, constrain him to feel, that his religious exercises are little better than a solemn mockery, and that his soul is unrefreshed. It was from feeling the sad effects of such scenes, that that eminent servant of God, Rev. R. M. McCheyne, of Scotland, at an early period of his christian experience, wrote in his diary— "This last bitter root of worldliness that has so often betrayed me has this night so grossly, that I cannot but regard it as God's chosen way to make me loathe and forsake it forever. I would vow; but it is much more like a weakly worm to pray. Sit thou in the dust, O my soul." To me it is not at all surprising, that the gay and thoughtless delight in the excitement and the levity of the dance; for whilst it affords them the kind of pleasure they relish, it is admirably adapted to banish from the mind those sober reflections to which they are so averse. But how a christian can enjoy it, I profess myself wholly unable to conceive. I certainly do not understand the religious feelings of such. I stand in doubt of them. Let me ask such persons, whether before going to a dance, they can, with a good conscience and in faith, ask their Savior to be with them, and to accompany the exercises of the evening with his blessing? Can they pray— "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil?" And suppose it were proposed, after the last set have danced, to sing

a hymn and offer prayer to God before the company should disperse; would not even they, professors of religion though they are, feel that there was a singular incongruity in closing such exercises in such a way? It is a most salutary rule adopted by Dr. Watts, and by him recommended to others, never to do any thing upon which he *could not*, or upon which he *did not*, ask the blessing of God.

But there are professing Christians who tell us, they have no taste for such amusements, but who are quite ready to have their children taught to dance, and to send them, dressed in the extreme of the fashion, to dances and balls. They thus throw them into the society of the worldly, the gay, the irreligious; and from the very fact, that in that circle they find the warmest advocates of their favorite amusement, and the most graceful dancers, they become identified with them in feeling, and make them their most intimate associates. "*Evil communications corrupt good manners.*" It is impossible that the sentiments of your children shall not be influenced, and their habits and characters formed, to a great extent, by the society they choose. And by no class of intelligent people is true religion treated with less respect, or the gospel more lightly spoken of, than by those who most delight in the giddy dance.—There may be exceptions; but the general rule I know to be as I have stated. Would you have your children think more of the latest fashions, graceful carriage in the ball-room, the theatre, and the novel, than of religion and eternity; teach them to dance, and throw them into this gay, thoughtless, Christless circle. And if they soon talk skeptically of the Bible, and disrespectfully of true religion, be not surprised.

There is no duty devolved on religious parents, more important, and upon which the piety and the happiness of their children more depend, than the selection of the society in which they are to mingle. There are multitudes of the most unprincipled, dissipated and worthless young men, who can display themselves to great advantage in the ball-room. Their connexions and their wealth give them a respectable standing in society. Your daughters, unacquainted with their true character, pleased with their polished manners, and deceived by the flattery they know so well how to employ, form attachments you cannot control, and which make them wretched through life. Nor are the most graceful dancers amongst young females, those who will best fill the important station of wives and mothers.

The introduction of children to this fascinating amusement, and to the circle where it is most prized, places a mighty obstacle in the way of their conversion. I am aware, that many religious parents desire to have their children dance, not for the sake of the amusement itself, but because it is commonly practiced in the circle into which they would introduce them. But they would do well first to consider the effect this course is likely to produce in hindering their conversion to God. That their children may, at an early age, become true Christians, is certainly the chief desire of all truly pious parents; and most solemnly have they covenanted to use all the means of divine appointment to secure this desirable result. Are they, then, at liberty—will their feelings or their principles allow them, for any worldly consideration, to place them under powerful influences adapted to harden their hearts, and neutralize all God's means of grace?

Not only will their sentiments and habits be influenced by their thoughtless and pleasure-seeking associates, but their attachment to them, and their familiarity with them, will be one of the most effectual reasons why they will not think seriously, and why they will struggle to smother any convictions which the Word and the Spirit of God may fasten upon their minds. Human nature does not easily bear the taunting remark—"Such a one is becoming quite religious; her face is getting very long; she is too conscientious to dance." What numbers of young persons have plunged into scenes of gaiety and dissipation, which they could no longer enjoy, for the express purpose of concealing and of smothering those deep convictions impressed by the Spirit of God upon their souls. And how many have avoided every place where such impressions were likely to be made. "What will my associates think?—what will they say?" These are the inquiries suggested to those who have moved in the gay and thoughtless circle, when the first serious impressions are fastened upon their minds; and often they are sufficient to determine them not to yield to their convictions. How much less difficulty would they feel, had they been accustomed from childhood, to refuse on principle to conform to the world, and to participate in its levity and folly. Then they would not be ashamed to have it known, that they are seeking to do their duty.

I have alluded to the feverish excitement and the levity of the ball-room. Few things are so well adapted to dissipate all serious reflections, and eradicate religious feelings. I do not object to

cheerfulness in the young; but *levity*—that levity, which revels uncontrolled in the ball-room, is folly unbecoming rational and accountable beings. If deep religious impressions should be made on the mind of a daughter of one of the members of this church, by the solemn exercises of the Sabbath; and if during the week, one of your dances should be attended by her; I should have little hope of finding her thoughtful on the following Sabbath. It is indeed possible that the Spirit of God may follow her into the scenes of gaiety and folly, and distress her there; but there is great reason to fear his final withdrawal from the soul. Those who will trifle, when the Holy Spirit is bidding them pause and "consider their ways," must expect to be abandoned to their own hardness of heart. And will not your daughter, accustomed to dance, be prevailed on to go, even though deeply convinced that she ought not? Is she likely to resist, when her young associates gather round her, and first entreat, and then taunt her with being *serious*? She is now powerfully tempted, and will in all probability yield. Who exposed her to this temptation? Her parents, who had her taught to dance, and introduced her to this gay and ungodly circle; and they will be responsible for the result.

This is not all. When your children shall think of the duty of becoming members of the church on their own profession, will they not hesitate long, before they will agree to part with the gay circle and the fascinating dance? And this is a sacrifice, which, if they become Presbyterians, they must make. Our church has, from the beginning, taken her stand on this subject; and I verily believe, she will never recede from it. Particular churches may be lax in discipline; but that the Presbyterian church will ever tolerate dancing in her members, is not to be expected. Read the answer to the 139th question in the larger Catechism, and see what she thinks of it. Is it wise, is it right, for Presbyterians to place their children under such influences, that they will be unwilling to be members of the same church?—or indeed of any spiritual church?

An excellent minister, who has been, for several years, the pastor of a wealthy church in one of our large cities, recently informed me, that young persons, under deep religious impressions, had frequently called to converse with him, who, in consequence of their exceeding fondness for dancing and their consequent unwillingness to give it up, had returned to the world and become as thoughtless as before.

Multitudes who never converse with a minister of the gospel, succeed in stifling their convictions in view of the same temptation.

Perhaps it will be said, our children will have no inclination to dance, when they become settled in life. Do you, then, expect them to continue unconverted, till their youth is past? Is it not the solemn duty of pious parents to seek the conversion of their children in early youth? Is it not written — "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" But what if they die in the bloom of youth, in the midst of that gaiety and levity which you think maturer years will lead them to abandon? Why do even religious parents seem to forget, that youth and health afford no certain protection against the arrows of death? And how awful the death of one whose days have been spent in giddy thoughtlessness! How overwhelming to truly pious parents to have a child die thus!

But suppose them to live to that period, when, as you imagine, they will cease to take pleasure in dancing; will the habits early formed, and the moral impressions made on their minds, be easily eradicated? God has said — "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Is it in view of this divine direction that religious parents have their children taught to dance, and encourage them to attend dancing parties and balls? And even should God, notwithstanding the inconsistency and unfaithfulness of their parents, turn their hearts to the ways of wisdom, will not early habits and practices add to the number of their temptations? I beg leave here to quote the language of one of the most popular female writers of our day on this subject — I mean, Caroline Fry. "Surely, if these parents knew how the images of bygone things stay by the imagination when the heart regrets them; how they pursue us in our devotions, follow us to the very presence of our Maker — disturb our prayers, pollute our offerings, mix their unhallowed images with our visions of delight, and cross every sunbeam of heavenly consolation — surely they would spare to stain the young memory with one needless image of forbidden things. And how is it that they do not know? When I think of these things I am at a loss. I ask myself, if it is possible, that one believer's heart is so unlike another's, that the memory of folly should be no pain, and the habit of sin no fetter, and earthly associations no temptation."

But it is replied to all this, that young persons desire to dance and to attend balls; and preventing them will only increase their

anxiety to participate in them. Then why restrain them in any indulgence they may desire? Why not cease to exercise parental authority, and let them follow their own inclinations? You say, this is carrying the thing to an extreme. It is only carrying out your own principles; for if it is wise and right to restrain your children from improper indulgencies in one case, why not in another? The principle is false. Indulgence in that which is improper, especially in that which affords excitement and pleasure, sharpening the appetite, increases the desire for it. True—it will be of little advantage to prevent your children dancing, unless you give them reasons for so doing; and it may prove positively injurious if, whilst you restrain them, you declare your opinion in favor of it, and censure the Church of Christ for her opposition to it. But restrain them, and assign your reasons; and though their desire to participate in such amusements, may prevent them from acknowledging themselves convinced; they will yet, to some extent, feel their force, and will, in years to come, thank you for your firmness and fidelity.

Another objection is urged, viz: that many of the plays and much of the conversation in which young persons engage, when they meet together, are quite as objectionable as dancing; and large, fashionable parties not a whit less so. I freely admit, that the foolish play and silly conversation in which young persons sometimes engage, are objectionable, and that christians, young and old, should discountenance them. Nor will I deny, that the same may be true of large, fashionable parties. But it does not follow, that because these things are improper, dancing must be right. It is not admitted, however, that they are *as injurious* either to health or religion, as dancing, as now conducted. But are we to be told, that young persons, properly educated and trained, cannot spend a few hours together in the enjoyment of music, or rational conversation, but that they must and will resort to something that is foolish or wrong? What an imputation to cast upon the children of pious parents! It cannot be so; we have often seen it otherwise.

4.—It is an objection of no trifling weight to dancing parties and balls, that they are often the cause of most unpleasant feelings and of serious difficulties. Envy and jealousy often find place in the bosoms of the dancers; and under the excitement produced by the circumstances and by the wine which circulates freely, difficulties arise, which chivalrous young gentlemen feel bound to settle by

a duel, or in some equally honorable way! These things are not of unfrequent occurrence.

5.—But suppose, after all, you are not convinced that it is wrong to attend dancing parties, and to have your children taught to dance; I have another consideration to present, which must, I think, have weight with every Christian. You will agree with me, that the great business of the Christian's life is to do good in the church; "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." The text and context are in point here. The Christian, as we have seen, is to be wholly consecrated to the service of God, as was the sacrifice on the Jewish altar. You will admit, too, that they who would glorify God in the church, must be able to exert a favorable influence on the minds of men. "Let your light so shine *before men*, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Such being the great business of life, has the Christian the right, for any amusement either for himself or his children, to destroy, or seriously to diminish his power to do that work? I can anticipate your answer; you will admit that he has not.

Now it is a fact, of which you cannot be ignorant, that vast numbers of serious Christians, the large majority of those in our own church, do regard attendance upon dancing parties and balls, and sending children to dancing-schools, as wholly inconsistent with a Christian profession. Nor will it do to say, that such objections come only from the ignorant and the bigotted—from those who know little or nothing on the subject, or who cannot themselves participate in those refined amusements. They come from multitudes of the wisest and best members in our church and in other churches; persons who, (at least many of them,) have danced as gracefully and with as much pleasure, as those who now advocate the amusement. They know by experience the evils to which it introduces the young, the temptations it places before them, and the obstacles it throws in the way of their salvation.

But suppose them all in error — all under the influence of mere prejudice. Still the prejudice exists; it is very extensive, and deeply fixed; and you cannot remove it. Now, if you attend dancing parties, or send your children to dancing schools, you deeply wound the feelings of all those whom you perhaps regard as weak brethren, and

shake their confidence in your piety. Your christian influence over them is thus destroyed, and the christian fellowship which ought to exist between you and them, is no longer enjoyed. In vain would you tell them, however kindly, of a fault you might observe in them; in vain might you exhort them to higher attainments in piety, or seek to comfort them in affliction. You have not their confidence.

The evil extends much further. There are not a few unconverted persons who do not, and never will, believe that christians can consistently practice or encourage dancing; and many even of those who are most anxious to have it recognised by the church as innocent, have the same convictions. Dancing occupies a kind of half-way ground between the church and the world, seemingly less injurious to religion, than the theatre, the circus, or the card-table, and is therefore a most effectual introduction to all the follies of the world. Hence the desire amongst the worldly to have the church patronize it, or at least tolerate it as innocent. But let it be known, that a professor of religion attends the dance, or has his children taught to dance; and he has lost all his christian influence over those whose convictions, secret or expressed, are such as I have mentioned. In vain would he attempt to point them to the Saviour, and urge them to embrace religion. They doubt or wholly disbelieve his piety, and are disgusted with his apparent zeal. It appears to them nothing more nor less than hypocrisy.

And is dancing of so much importance to you, my friends, or to your children, that for the sake of enjoying it, you will, to so great an extent, destroy your usefulness in the church of Christ? Paul would eat no meat as long as he lived, if by so doing he should cause a brother to offend. Even politicians carefully avoid exciting the prejudices of those over whom they would exert political influence. And cannot you give up dancing, that you may glorify your Redeemer, and do good to the souls of men? I am a minister of the gospel; but I am as deeply interested in the prosperity of my country, as any other man. Suppose, then, I give notice that on a certain day of this week I will make a speech in some public place, in favor of the political doctrines of the Whigs or the Democrats, as my convictions may be. Have I the right to do so? Would it be proper? Every member of my church, I am persuaded, would condemn such a course. Why? I may say, that all this public sentiment against ministers who make political speeches, is an unreasonable prejudice—that there is nothing in the Bible to sustain it. You are prepared with an answer. You

tell me that, right or wrong, the prejudice exists; and that it would be a great sin for me to injure my usefulness as a minister of the gospel, for the sake of publicly advocating any controverted political principles. I admit the conclusiveness of your reasoning. Now apply it to the case in hand. Has an elder, a deacon, or a private member of the church, any better right to destroy or injure his usefulness, than I have to injure mine? His position in the church may not be so important and so responsible as mine; but if he have only one talent, has he the right to bury that? The argument appears to me conclusive.

But let us approach a little nearer the subject in hand. Suppose your pastor should commence attending dancing parties, should occasionally dance, and should send his children to the dancing-school; would you regard such a course as proper? Would you desire to continue his labors among you? If there is no harm in dancing, why should not he dance? Does not he need relaxation? And is it not quite as important for his children to acquire a graceful carriage, as for the children of his people? Yet you would condemn in him such a course. You would insist, that he has no right, for the sake of this amusement, or even for the purpose of having his children walk gracefully, to cripple his usefulness in the church. Your reasoning is sound. Apply it to your own case; and you will never attend a dancing-party, nor send your children to a dancing-school.

6 — Finally, when an individual voluntarily unites himself to a society of any kind, knowing its rules and making no objections to them, he stands pledged, so long as he continues to hold his membership, to regard those rules. If, then, after having secured a standing as a member, he begins to condemn one or all of them as unwise and improper, and to disregard them; he is justly chargeable with having practiced deep deception, and with dishonorably violating an expressed or implied pledge; — a pledge without which he would not have been received. Now it is well known, that the Presbyterian church has ever regarded dancing, and having children taught to dance, as inconsistent with a christian profession, and has by her rules excluded those chargeable with such conduct. Particular churches may have neglected to enforce her discipline; but yet her principles have been well known. Those who have joined the church, have sought admission, knowing her rules, aware of her opposition to worldly amusements, and most solemnly promising, virtually or expressly, to regard them strictly, and thus to seek the peace, as well as the purity,

of the church. Now how can they, without being chargeable with conduct which no christian will defend, trample the rules of the church under foot, disturb its peace, and set at defiance its constituted authorities? I would most solemnly press this question upon the conscience of every Presbyterian who hears me, and who (if there be any such present) patronizes dancing.

I hold, that all Presbyterians are most solemnly bound so long as they occupy a place in the church, to abstain from every thing of the kind, and to honor and sustain her discipline. For it cannot be brought into contempt or disregard in one particular, without losing its moral power in all others. Whenever one law of the land is disregarded with impunity, the government is greatly weakened. Those Christians who, relying on their high standing in society, seem to defy the public sentiment, and the discipline of the church, certainly know not what they do. They pursue a course which the church of Christ can never safely permit.

My friends, we are moving on rapidly to eternity. The time is short; and we have a great work to do. We have no time to loiter by the way—no time to turn aside to enjoy the vain amusements of a thoughtless world. We shall feel this truth on our dying bed. When the light of eternity begins to break upon the mind, we shall see many things in a new light. We shall be amazed at the manner in which we spent many of our precious hours and days;—amazed at the indifference with which we now mingle with the unconverted who are in danger of eternal death;—amazed that these vain amusements should have had power to tempt us for a moment. Let us now look at these things in the clear light of God's word. Let us redeem the time, because the days are evil. Let it be our effort and prayer to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called."

Let me address myself to the young professors of religion in the audience. My young friends, it was but the other day, you professed to choose Jesus as your Savior, and his service as the business and the joy of your life. You solemnly renounced the world and all its vanities, the emptiness of which you professed to have seen; and in the awful name of the adorable Trinity, the water of purification, the seal of his covenant was applied to you. Thus were you consecrated to his service exclusively and forever. Then you sat, with hearts heaving with deep emotion, at the table of your Savior; and with his children, over the emblems of his broken body and shed blood, swore eternal allegiance to him. Can you so far forget those

solemn scenes, and so far disregard your solemn promises as to mingle again in the giddy dance, to your own injury, to the reproach of the cause of Christ, and the triumph of those who anxiously look for your halting? Will you not now serve God more faithfully, and make it your daily business to let your light shine before men? Will you not persuade your gay companions to abandon their follies and go with you, instead of confirming them in their ruinous course by again uniting with them? Will you harden their hearts by giving them reason to say, you are no better than they? I cannot but hope, and believe, that you are truly converted to God; and if you are, you will walk circumspectly toward them without, and endeavor prayerfully, by a consistent walk, to adorn the profession you have made, and to win them to Christ.

Need I say a word more to professing parents? Remember, my friends, your covenant to train up your children for God and for heaven. Set them such an example, so train them, that when you on your dying bed bid them adieu, you may have nothing to regret. Seek their speedy conversion to God, first and above all, and other things in subordination to this great object.

My unconverted friends, I cannot wonder that many of you, especially the young, are pleased with the world's exciting pleasures; but most sincerely do I desire for you more enduring and more exalted enjoyment. Abandon those things which an inspired man of extensive experience pronounced "vanity of vanities," and the utter emptiness of which a very little reflection will enable you to see. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and in his service and the glorious hopes imparted by his grace, we promise you real, elevated, enduring happiness. The religion of Christ is not a gloomy religion. Far from discouraging cheerfulness, it lays a foundation not for cheerfulness only, but for the most exalted and imperishable happiness — a happiness which will not forsake you when, in the decline of life, you can no longer participate in the vain pleasures with which the world tempts you. "Godliness is profitable unto all things; having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." He who lives as a rational, immortal being — who lives for eternity — will have little to regret in the retrospect of life; and, washed in the atoning blood of Christ, he will have nothing to fear in the eternal furture.